THE SECOND SEX

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Introduction

For a long time I have hesitated to write a book on woman. The subject is irritating, especially to women; and it is not new. Enough ink has been spilled in the quarreling over femininity, now practically over, and perhaps we should say no more about it. It is still talked about, however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem. After all, is there a problem? And if so, what is it? Are there women, really? Most assuredly, the theory of the eternal feminine still has its adherents who will whisper in your ear: “Even in Russia women still are women” and other erudite persons—sometimes the very same—say with a sigh: “Woman is losing her way, woman is lost.” One wonders if women still exist, if they will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in this world, what their place should be. “What has become of women?” was asked recently in an ephemeral magazine.1

But first we must ask: what is a woman? “Tota mulier in utero,” says one, “woman is a womb.” But in speaking of certain women, connoisseurs declare that they are not women, although they are equipped with a uterus like the rest. All agree in recognizing the fact that females exist in the human species; today as always they make up about one half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity. Is this attribute something willed by the ovum? Or is it a Platonic essence, a product of the philosophic imagination? Is it a rustling peticott enough to bring it down to earth? Although some women try zealously to incarnate this essence, it is hardly patentable. It is frequently described in vague and dancing terms that seem to have been borrowed from the vocabulary of the sea, and indeed in the treatise of St. Thomas it was considered an essence as certainly defined as the somniferous virtue of the poppy.

1 Parchman, devil today.
with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it. "The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities," said Aristotle; "we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness." And St. Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be an "imperfect man," an "incidental" being. This is symbolized in Genesis where Eve is depicted as made from what Bossuet called "a supernumerary bone" of Adam.

Thus hostility is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. Michelet wrote: "Woman, the relative being...." And Benda is most positive in his Rapport d'Uzès: "The body of man makes sense in itself quite apart from that of woman, whereas the latter seems wanting to be significant by itself. A man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man." And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called "the sex," by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex—absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the accessory as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. 4

The category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality—that of the Self and the Other. This duality was not originally attached to the division of the sexes; it was not depended upon any empirical facts. It is revealed in such works as that of Granet on Chinese thought and those of Dumézil on the East Indies and Rome. The feminine element was at first no more involved in such pairs as Varuna-Mitra, Uranos-Zeus, Sun-Moon, and Day-Night than it was in the contrasts between Good and Evil, lucky and unlucky auspices, right and left, God and Lucifer. Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought.

Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself. If three travelers chance to occupy the same compartment, that is enough to make vaguely hostile "others" out of all the rest of the passengers on the train. In small towns even all persons not belonging to the village are "strangers" and suspect; to the native of a country all who inhabit other countries are "foreigners": Jews are "different" for the anti-Semite, Negroes are "inferior" for American racists, aborigines are "natives" for colonists, proletarians are the "lower class" for the privileged.

Lévi-Strauss, at the end of a profound work on the various forms of primitive societies, reaches the following conclusion: "Passage from the state of Nature to the state of Culture is marked by man's ability to view biological relations as a series of contrasts, duality, alternation, opposition, and symmetry, whether milder definite or vague forms, constitute not so much phenomena to be explained as fundamental and immediately given data of social reality." 5 These phenomena would be incomprehensible if in fact human society were simply a Mitokos or fellowship based on solidarity and friendliness. Things become clear, on the contrary, if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility toward every other consciousness, the subject can be posed only in being opposed—he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the incidental, the object.

But the other consciousness, the other ego, sets up a reciprocal claim. The native traveling abroad is shocked to find himself in turn regarded as a "stranger" by the natives of neighboring countries. As a matter of fact, wars, festivals, trading, treaties, and contests among tribes, nations, and classes tend to deprive the concept Other of its absolute sense and to make manifest its relativity; willfully, individuals and groups are forced to realize the reciprocity of their relations. How is it, then, that this reciprocity has not been recognized

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4 See C. Lévi-Strauss: Les Structures Élementaires de la parenté. My thanks are due to C. Lévi-Strauss for his kindness in forwarding me with the proofs of his work, which, among others, I have used liberally in Part II.
between the sexes, that one of the contrasting terms is set up as the sole essential, denying any relativity in regard to its correlative and defining the latter as pure otherness? Why is it that women do not dispute male sovereignty? No subject will readily volunteer to become the object, the inessential; it is not the Other who, in defining himself as the Other, establishes the One. The Other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One. But if the Other is not to regain the status of the One, he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view. Whence comes this submission in the case of women?

There are, to be sure, other cases in which a certain category has been able to dominate another completely for a time. Very often this privilege depends upon inequality of numbers—the majority imposes its rule upon the minority or persuades it. But women are not a minority, like the American Negroes or the Jews; there are as many women on earth. Again, the two groups concerned have often been originally independent; they may have been formerly unaware of each other's existence, or perhaps they recognized each other's autonomy. But a historical event has resulted in the subjugation of the weaker by the stronger. The scattering of the Jews, the introduction of slavery into America, the conquests of imperialism are examples in point. In those cases the oppressed retained at least the memory of former days; they possessed in common a past, a tradition, sometimes a religion or a culture.

The parallel drawn by Bebel between women and the proletariat is valid in that neither ever formed a minority or a separate collective unit of mankind. And instead of a single historical event it is in both cases a historical development that explains their status as a class and accounts for the membership of particular individuals in that class. But proletarians have not always existed, whereas there have always been women. They are women in virtue of their anatomy and physiology. Throughout history they have always been subordinate to men, and hence their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change—it was not something that occurred. The reason why otherness in this case seems to be an absolute is in part that it lacks the contingent or incidental nature of historical facts. A condition brought about at a certain time can be abolished at some

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8 With some exceptions, perhaps the certain maternal instinct, emotional and the like—Ta.

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other time, as the Negroes of Haiti and others have proved; but it might seem that a natural condition is beyond the possibility of change. In truth, however, the nature of things is no more immutable given, once for all, than is historical reality. If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change. Proletarians say "We"; Negroes also. Regarding themselves as subjects, they transform the bourgeois, the whites, into "others." But women do not say "We," except at some congress of feminists or similar formal demonstration; men say "women," and women use the same word in referring to themselves. They do not authentically assume a subjective attitude. The proletarians have accomplished the revolution in Russia; the Negroes in Haiti, the Indo-Chinese are battling for it in Indo-China; but the women's effort has never been anything more than a symbolic agitation. They have gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received—

The reason for this is that women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat. They are not even promiscuously herded together in the way that creates community feeling among the American Negroes, the ghetto Jews, the workers of Saint-Denis, or the factory hands of Renault. They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men—fathers or husbands—more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women; if they are white, their allegiance is to white men, not to Negro women. The proletariat can propose to massacre the ruling class, and a sufficiently fanatic Jew or Negro might dream of getting sole possession of the atomic bomb and making humanity wholly Jewish or black; but women cannot even dream of exterminating the males. The bond that unites her to her oppressors is not comparable to any other. The division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history. Male and female stand opposed within a primordial Matethein, and woman has not broken it.

The couple is a fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible.

8 See Part II, ch. viii.
Introduction

Here is to be found the basic trait of woman: she is the Other in a totality of which the two components are necessary to one another.

One could suppose that this reciprocity might have facilitated the liberation of woman. When Heracles sat at the feet of Omphale and helped with her spinning, his desire for her held him captive; but why did she fail to gain a lasting power? To revenge herself on Jason, Medea killed their children; and this grim legend would seem to suggest that she might have obtained a formidable influence over him through his love for her offspring. In Lycurgus Aristophanes depicts a band of women who joined forces to gain social ends through the sexual needs of their men; but this is only a play. In the legend of the Sabine women, the latter soon abandoned their plot of remaining sterile to punish their ravilers. In truth woman has not been socially emancipated through man's need—sexual desire and the desire for offspring—which makes the male dependent for satisfaction upon the female.

Master and slave, also, are united by a reciprocal need, in this case economic, which does not liberate the slave. In the relation of master to slave the master does not make a point of the need that he has for the other; he has in his grasp the power of satisfying this need through his own action, whereas the slave, in his dependent condition, has no hope and fear, in quite conscious of the need he has for his master. Even if the need is at bottom equally urgent for both, it always works in favor of the oppressor and against the oppressed. That is why the liberation of the working class, for example, has been slow.

Now woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality. And even today woman is heavily handicapped, though her situation is beginning to change. Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as man's, and frequently it is much to her disadvantage. Even when her rights are legally recognized in the abstract, long-standing custom prevents their full expression in the persons. In the economic sphere men and women can almost be said to make up two castes; other things being equal, the former hold the better jobs, get higher wages, and have more opportunities for success than their new competitors. In industry and politics men have a great many more positions and they monopolize the most important posts. In addition to all this, they enjoy a traditional prestige that the education of children tends in every way to support, for the present enshrines the past—and in the past all history has been made by men. At the present time, when women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world, it is still a world that belongs to men—they have no doubt of it at all and women have scarcely any. To decline to be the Other, to refuse to be a party to the deal—this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste. Man-the-sovereign will provide woman-the-subject with material protection and will undertake the moral justification of her existence; thus she can evade all both economic risk and the metaphysical risk of a life in which ends and aims must be contrived without assistance. Indeed, along with the ethical urge of each individual to affirm his subjective existence, there is also the temptation to long for liberty and become a flying. This is an inexpressible road, for he who takes it—passive, just, ruined—becomes lost with the creature of another's will, frustrated in his transcendence and deprived of every value. But it is an easy road; on it one avoids the strain involved in undertaking an authentic existence. When man makes of woman the Other, he may, then, expect her to manifest deep-seated tendencies toward complicity. Thus, woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other.

But it will be asked at once: how did all this begin? It is easy to see that the duality of the sexes, like any duality, gives rise to conflict. And doubtless the winner will assume the status of absolute. But why should man have won from the start? It seems possible that women could have won the victory; or that the outcome of the conflict might never have been decided. How is it that this world has always belonged to the men and that things have begun to change only recently? Is this change a good thing? Will it bring about an equal sharing of the world between men and women?

These questions are not new, and they have often been answered. But the very fact that woman is the Other tends to cast suspicion upon all the justifications that men may have ever been able to provide for it. These have all too evidently been dictated by men's interest. A little-known feminist of the seventeenth century, Pauline de la Barre, put it this way: "All that has been written about women by men should..."
be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuit. Every-where, at all times, the males have displayed their satisfaction in feeling that they are the lords of creation. "Blessed be God . . . that He did not make me a woman," say the Jews in their morning prayers, while their wives pray on a note of resignation: "Blessed be the Lord, who created me according to His will." The first among the blessings for which Plato thanked the gods was that he had been created free, not enslaved, the second, a man, not a woman. But the males could not enjoy this privilege fully unless they believed it to be founded on the absolute and the eternal; they sought to make the fact of their supremacy into a right. "Being men, those who have made and compiled the laws have favored their own sex, and jurists have elevated these laws into principles," to quote Poulain de la Barre once more.

Legislators, preists, philosophers, writers, and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. The religions invented by men reflect this wish for domination. In the legends of Eve and Pandora men have taken up arms against women. They have made use of philosophy and theology, as the quotations from Aristotle and St. Thomas have shown. Since ancient times satirists and moralists have delighted in showing up the weaknesses of women. We are familiar with the savage insinuations hurled against women throughout French literature. Molière, for example, follows the tradition of Jean de Meun, though with less gusto. This hostility may at times be well founded, often it is gratuitous; but in truth it more or less successfully conceals a desire for self-justification. As Montaigne says, "It is easier to accuse one sex than to excuse the other." Sometimes what is going on is clear enough. For instance, the Roman law limiting the rights of woman cited "the inequality, the instability of the sex" just when the weakening of family ties seemed to threaten the interests of male heirs. And in the effort to keep the married woman under guardianship, appeal was made in the sixteenth century to the authority of St. Augustine, who declared that "woman is a creature neither defective nor constant." at a time when the single woman was thought capable of managing her property. Montaigne understood clearly how arbitrary and unjust was woman's appointed lot: "Women are not in the wrong when they decline to accept the rules laid down for them, since the men make these rules without consulting them. No wonder intrigue and strife abound." But he did not go so far as to champion their cause.

It was only later, in the eighteenth century, that genuinely democratic men began to view this matter objectively. Diderot, among others, strove to show that woman is, like man, a human being. Later John Stuart Mill came fervently to her defense. But these philosophers displayed unusual impartiality. In the nineteenth century the feminist quarrel became again a quarrel of partisans. One of the consequences of the industrial revolution was the entrance of women into productive labor, and it was just here that the claims of the feminists emerged from the realms of theory and acquired an economic basis, while their opponents became the more aggressive. Although landed property lost power to some extent, the bourgeoisie clung to the old morality that found the guarantee of private property in the solidity of the family. Woman was ordered back into the home the more harshly as her emancipation became a real menace. Even within the working class the men endeavored to restrain woman's liberation, because they began to see the women as dangerous competitors—the more so because they were accustomed to work for lower wages.*

In proving woman's inferiority, the antifeminists then began to draw not only upon religion, philosophy, and theology, as before, but also upon science—biology, experimental psychology, etc. At most they were willing to grant "equality in difference" to the other sex. That profitable formula is most significant; it is precisely like the "equal but separate" formula of the Jim Crow laws aimed at the North American Negroes. As is well known, this so-called equalitarian segregation has resulted only in the most extreme discrimination. The similarity just noted is in no way due to chance, for whether it is a race, a caste, a class, or a sex that is reduced to a position of inferiority, the methods of justification are the same. "The eternal feminine" corresponds to "the black soul" and to "the Jewish character." True, the Jewish problem is on the whole very different from the other two—to the anti-Semitic the Jew is not so much an inferior as he is an enemy for whom there is to be granted no place on earth, for whom annihilation is the fate desired. But there are deep similarities between the situation of woman and that of the Negro. Both are being emasculated today from a like paternalism, and the former master class wishes to "keep them in their place"—that is, the place chosen for

* See Part II, pp. 115-17.
Introduction

duly the speaker referred to is not reflecting the ideas of Maurice himself, for no one knows of his having any. It may be that she reflects ideas originating with men, but even among men there are those who have been known to appropriate ideas not their own; and one can well ask whether Casule Maurice might not find more interesting a conversation reflecting Desartres, Marx, or Gilde rather than himself. What is really remarkable is that by using the questionable we he identifies himself with St. Paul, Hegel, Lenin, and Nietzsche, and from the lofty eminence of their grandeur looks down disdainfully upon the petty of women who make bold to converse with him on a footing of equality. In truth, I know of no one woman who would refuse to suffer with patience Maurice’s “tone of polite indifference.”

I have lingered on this example because the masculine attitude is here displayed with unsparing ingenuity. But men profit in many more subtle ways from the otherness, the alterity of woman. Here is miraculous balm for those afflicted with an inferiority complex, and indeed no one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility. Those who are not fear-obsessed in the presence of their fellow men are much more disposed to recognize a fellow creature in woman; but even to these the myth of Woman, the Cité, is precious for many reasons. They cannot be blamed for not cheerfully relinquishing all the benefits they derive from the myth, for they realize what they would lose in relinquishing woman as they fancy her to be, while they fail to realize what they have to gain from the woman of tomorrow. Refusal to pose oneself as the Subject, unique and absolute, requires great self-denial. Furthermore, the vast majority of men make no such claim explicitly. They do not project woman as inferior, for today they are too thoroughly imbued with the ideal of democracy not to recognize all human beings as equals.

In the bottom of the family, woman seems in the eyes of childhood  

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1 A significant article on this theme by Michel Carrouges appeared in No. 352 of the Cahiers du Sud. He writes indignantly: “Would there were no woman—women (at but only a cohort of coots, maroots, prostituts, and shleshektins serving functions of passion us unchaste! Of this is to say, in his view woman has no existence in and for herself; he thinks only of her function in the male world. Her reason for existence lies in man. But then, in fact, her role as function as a myth might be more valued than any others. The real problem is precisely to find out why woman should be defined with relation to man."

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2 Or at least he thought he could.
and youth to be clothed in the same social dignity as the adult males. Later on, the young man, desiring and loving, experiences the resistance, the independence of the woman desired and loved; in marriage, he respects woman as wife and mother, and in the concrete events of conjugal life she stands there before him as a free being. He can therefore feel that social subordination as between the sexes no longer exists and that on the whole, in spite of differences, woman is an equal. As, however, he observes some points of inferiority—the most important being unfitness for the professions—he attributes these to natural causes. When he is in a co-operative and benevolent relation with woman, his theme is the principle of abstract equality, and he does not base his attitude upon such inequality as may exist. But when he is in conflict with her, the situation is reversed: his theme will be the existing inequality, and he will even take it as justification for denying abstract equality.

So it is that many men will affirm as if in good faith that women are the equals of men and that they have nothing to clamor for, while at the same time they will say that women can never be the equals of man and that their demands are in vain. It is, in point of fact, a difficult matter for man to realize the extreme importance of social discriminations which seem outwardly insignificant but which produce in woman moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to spring from her original nature. The most sympathetic of men never fully comprehend woman's concrete situation. And there is no reason to put much trust in the men when they rush to the defense of privileges whose full extent they can hardly measure. We shall not, then, permit ourselves to be intimidated by the number and violence of the attacks launched against women, nor to be entrapped by the self-seeking sophistry bestowed on the "true woman," nor to profit by the extensiveness for woman's destiny manifested by men who would not for the world have any part of it.

We should consider the arguments of the feminists with no less suspicion, however, for very often their controversial aim deprives them of all real value. If the "woman question" seems trivial, it is because...

* For example, a man will say that he considers his wife in no wise degraded because she has no guided occupation. The profession of housework is just as laborsome, and so on, that when the first Guest comes, he will exclaim: "Why, you couldn't make your living without me!"

* The specific purpose of Book II of this study is to describe this process.
Introduction

There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence fails back into immaturity, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the “en-so”—the brutish life of subjectivity to given conditions—and of liberties into constraint and contingency. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spoils frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil. Every individual concerned to justify his existence feels that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects.

Now, what peculiarly signifies the situation of woman is that she—s a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to insufficiency since her transcendence is to be overlaid and forever transcended by another ego (conscience) which is essential and sovereign. The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego)—who always regards the self as the essential—and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the incidental. How can a human being in woman’s situation attain fulfillment? What roads are open to her? Which are blocked? How can independence be recovered in a state of dependency? What circumstances limit woman’s liberty and how can they be overcome? These are the fundamental questions on which I would fain throw some light. This means that I am interested in the fortunes of the individual as defined not in terms of happiness but in terms of liberty.

Quite evidently this problem would be without significance if we were to believe that woman’s destiny is inevitably determined by physiological, psychological, or economic forces. Hence I shall discuss first of all the light in which woman is viewed by biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism. Next I shall try to show exactly how the concept of the “truly feminine” has been fashioned—why woman has been defined as the Other—and what have been the consequences from man’s point of view. Then from woman’s point of view I shall describe the world in which women must live and thus we shall be able to envisage the difficulties in their way as, endeavoring to make their escape from the sphere allotted to them, they aspire to full manhood in the human race.
PART I

DESTINY

CHAPTER I

The Data of Biology

WOMAN? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female—this word is sufficient to define her. In the mouth of a man the epithet female has the sound of an insult, yet he is not ashamed of his animal nature; on the contrary, he is proud if someone says of him: "He is a male!" The term "female" is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman's animality, but because it impairs her in sex; and if this sex seems to man to be contemptible and inimical even in harmless dumb animals, it is evidently because of the uneasy hostility stirred up in him by woman. Nevertheless he wishes to find in biology a justification for this sentiment. The word female brings up in his mind a suraband of imagery—a vixen, round ovum engulfs and castrates the agile spermatozoen; the monstrous and swollen terrestrial queen rules over the enslaved males; the female praying mantis and the spider, satiated with love, crush and devour their partners; the bitch in heat runs through the alleys, trailing behind her a wave of degraded odors; the she-monkey presents her posterior insouciantly and then steals away with hypothetical coquetry; and the most superb wild beasts—the tiger, the lioness, the
Males and females are two types of individuals which are differentiated within a species for the function of reproduction; they can be defined only correlatively. But first it must be noted that even the division of a species into two sexes is not always clear-cut.

In nature it is not universally manifested. To speak only of animals, it is well known that among the microscopic one-celled forms—infusoria, ameba, sporozoans, and the like—multiplication is fundamentally distinct from sexuality. Each cell divides and subdivides by itself. In many-celled animals or metazoa reproduction may take place sexually, either by schizogenesis—that is, by fission or cutting into two or more parts which become new individuals—or by blastogenesis—that is, by buds that separate and form new individuals. The phenomenon of budding observed in the fresh-water hydra and other polyclanes, in sponges, worms, and lice, are well-known examples. In cases of parthenogenesis the egg of the virgin female develops into an embryo without fertilization by the male, which thus may play no role at all. In the honeybee copulation takes place, but the eggs may or may not be fertilized at the time of laying. The unfertilized eggs undergo development and produce the drones (males); the aphid males are absent during a series of generations in which the eggs are unfertilized and produce females. Parthenogenesis has been induced artificially in the sea urchin, the starfish, the frog, and other species. Among the one-celled animals (Protozoa), however, two cells may fuse, forming what is called a zygote, and in the honeybee fertilization is necessary if the eggs are to produce females. In the aphids both males and females appear in the autumn, and the fertilized eggs then produced are adapted for overwintering.

Certain biologists in the past concluded from these facts that even in species capable of natural propagation occasional fertilization is necessary to renew the vigor of the race—to accomplish “rejuvenation”—through the mixing of hereditary material from two individuals.

On this hypothesis sexuality might well appear to be an indispensable function in the most complex forms of life; only the lower organisms could multiply without sexuality, and even here vitality would after a time become exhausted. But today this hypothesis is largely abandoned; research has proved that under suitable conditions asexual multiplication can go on indefinitely without noticeable degeneration, a fact that is especially striking in the bacteria and Protozoa. More and more numerous and daring experiments in parthenogenesis are being performed, and in many species the male appears to be fundamentally unnecessary. Besides, if the value of intercellular exchange were demonstrated, that value would seem to stand as a sheer, unexplained fact. Biology certainly demonstrates the existence of sexual differentiation, but from the point of view of any end to be attained the science could not infer such differentiation from the structure of the cell, nor from the laws of cellular multiplication, nor from any basic phenomenon.

The production of two types of gametes, the sperm and the egg, does not necessarily imply the existence of two distinct sexes; as a matter of fact, egg and sperm—two highly differentiated types of reproductive cells—may both be produced by the same individual. This occurs in normally hermaphroditic species, which are common among plants and are also to be found among the lower animals, such as annelid worms and mollusks. In them reproduction may be accomplished through self-fertilization or, more commonly, cross-fertilization. Here again certain biologists have attempted to account for the existing state of affairs. Some hold that the separation of the gonads (ovaries and testes) in two distinct individuals represents an evolutionary advance over hermaphroditism; others on the contrary regard the separate condition as primitive, and believe that hermaphroditism represents a degenerate state. These notions regarding the superiority of one system or the other imply the most debatable evolutionary theorizing. All that we can say for sure is that these two modes of reproduction coexist in nature, that they both succeed in accomplishing the survival of the species concerned, and that the differentiation of the gametes, like that of the organisms producing them, appears to
The Second Sex: Facts and Myths

be accidental. It would seem, then, that the division of a species into male and female individuals is simply an irreducible fact of observation.

In most philosophies this fact has been taken for granted without preoccupation of explanation. According to the Platonic myth, there were at the beginning men, women, and hermaphrodites. Each individual had two faces, four arms, four legs, and two conjoined bodies. At a certain time they were split in two, and ever since each half seeks to regain its corresponding half. Later the gods decreed that new human beings should be created through the coupling of dissimilar halves. But it is only love that this story is intended to explain; division into sexes is given at the outset. Nor does Aristotle explain this division, for if matter and form must co-operate in all action, there is no necessity for the active and passive principles to be separated in two different categories of individuals. Thus St. Thomas proclaims woman an "incidental" being, which is a way of suggesting—from the male point of view—the accidental or contingent nature of sexuality. Hegel, however, would have been untrue to his passion for rationalism had he failed to attempt a logical explanation. Sexuality in his view represents the medium through which the subject attains a concrete sense of belonging to a particular kind (genre). "The sense of kind is produced in the subject as an effect which offsets this disproportionate sense of his individual reality, as a desire to find the sense of himself in another individual of his species through union with this other, to complete himself and thus to incorporate the kind (genre) within his own nature and bring it into existence. This is copulation" (Philosophy of Nature, Part 3, Section 360). And a little farther on: "The process consists in this, namely: that which they are in themselves, that is to say a single kind, one and the same subjective life, they also establish it as such." And Hegel states later that for the unifying process to be accomplished, there must first be sexual differentiation. But his expositors are not convincing: one feels it in all too distinctly the predomination to lead in every operation the three terms of the syllogism.

The persistence or transcendence of the individual toward the species, in which both individual and species are fulfilled, could be accomplished without the intervention of a third element in the simple relation of parent to offspring: that is to say, reproduction could be sexual. Or, if there were to be two progenitors, they could be simultaneous (as happens in hermaphroditic species) and differentiated only as particular individuals of a single type. Hegel's discussion reveals a most important significance of sexuality, but his mistake is always to argue from significance to necessity, to equate significance with necessity. Man gives significance to the sexes and their relations through sexual activity, just as he gives sense and value to all the functions that he exercises; but sexual activity is not necessarily implied in the nature of the human being. Merleau-Ponty notes in the *Phénoménologie de la perception* that human existence requires us to revise our ideas of necessity and contingency. "Existence," he says, "has no casual, fortuitous qualities, no content that does not contribute to the formation of its aspect; it does not admit the notion of sheer fact, for it is only through existence that the facts are manifested." True enough. But it is also true that there are conditions without which the very fact of existence itself would seem to be impossible. To be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view toward this world; but nothing requires that this body have this or that particular structure. Sartre discusses in *L'âtre et le néant* Heidegger's dictum to the effect that the real nature of man is bound up with death because of man's finite state. He shows that an existence which is finite and yet unlimited in time is conceivable; but none the less, if death were not resident in human life, the relation of man to the world and to himself would be profoundly disarranged—so much so that the statement "Man is mortal" would be seen to have significance quite other than that of a mere fact of observation. Were he immortal, an existent would no longer be what we call a man. One of the essential features of his career is that the progress of his life through time creates behind him and before him the infinite past and future, and it would seem, then, that the perpetuation of the species is the correlative of his individual limitation. Thus we can regard the phenomenon of reproduction as founded in the very nature of being. But we must stop there. The perpetuation of the species does not necessitate sexual differentiation. True enough, this differentiation is characteristic of exists; it is such an extent that it belongs in any realistic definition of existence. But it nevertheless remains true that both a mind without a body and an immortal man are strictly inconceivable, whereas we can imagine a parthenogenetic or hermaphroditic society.

On the respective functions of the two sexes man has entertained...
PART IV

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

CHAPTER XII

Childhood

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an Other. In so far as he exists in and for himself, the child would hardly be able to think of himself as sexually differentiated. In girls as in boys the body is first of all the radiation of a subjectivity, the instrument that makes possible the comprehension of the world: it is through the eyes, the hands, that children apprehend the universe, and not through the sexual parts. The dramas of birth and of weaning unfold after the same fashion for nurslings of both sexes; these have the same interests and the same pleasures; sucking is at first the source of their most agreeable sensations; then they go through an anal phase in which they get their greatest satis-
factions from the excretory functions, which they have in common. Their genital development is analogous; they explore their bodies with the same curiosity and the same indifference; from eltoris and penis they derive the same vague pleasure. As their sensibility comes to require an object, it is turned toward the mother: the soft, smooth, resilient feminine flesh is what arouses sexual desires, and these desires are prehensible; the girl, like the boy, kisses, handles, and caresses her mother in an aggressive way; she feels the same jealousy if a new child is born, and they show it in similar behavior patterns: vagrías, ambivalence, marital difficulties; and they resort to the same coquettish tricks to gain the love of adults. Up to the age of twelve the little girl is as strong as her brothers, and she shows the same mental powers; there is no field where she is debared from engaging in rivalry with them. If, well before puberty and sometimes even from early infancy, she seems to us to be already sexually determined, this is not because mysterious instincts directly doom her to passivity, coquetry, maternity; it is because the influence of others upon the child is a factor almost from the start, and thus she is indoctrinated with her vocation from her earliest years.

The world is at first represented in the newborn infant only by immanent sensations; he is still immersed in the bosom of the Whole as he was when he lived in a dark womb; when he is put to the breast or the nursing bottle he is still surrounded by the warmth of maternal flesh. Little by little he learns to perceive objects as distinct and separate from himself, and to distinguish himself from them. Meanwhile he is separated more or less brutally from the nourishing body. Sometimes the infant reacts to this separation by a violent crisis; in any case, it is about when the separation is accomplished, toward the age of six months, perhaps, that the child begins to show the desire to attach others through acts of mimicry that in time become real showing off. Certainly this attitude is not established through a considered choice but it is not necessary to conceive a situation for it to exist. The unsightly boy directly the basic drama of every existence: that of his relation to the Other. Man experiences with anguish his being turned loose, his fortissimo. In flight from his freedom, his subjectivity, he would find his self in the bosom of the Whole.

\[1\] Judith Constan relates in her memoirs that she wept and cried so pitifully when taken from her nurse that they had to bring her back, and she was not quieted until she had breast milk.

Here, indeed, is the origin of his cosmic and pantheistic dreams, of his longing for oblivion, for sleep, for ecstasy, for death. He never succeeds in abolishing his separate ego, but at least he wants to attain the solidarity of the in himself, the ego, to be petrified into a thing. It is especially when he is fixed by the gaze of other persons that he appears to himself as being one.

It is in this perspective that the behavior of the child must be interpreted: in carnal form he discovers faintness, solitude, fear; devoid of a sense of the numberless in a strange world. He endeavors to compensate for this catastrophe by projecting his existence into an image, the reality and value of which others will establish. It appears that he may begin to affirm his identity at the time when he recognizes his reflection in a mirror—a time that coincides with that of weaning: his ego becomes so fully identified with this reflected image that it is formed only in being projected. Whether or not the mirror actually plays a more or less considerable part, it is certain that the child commences toward the age of six months to mimic his parents, and under their gaze to regard himself as an object. He is already an autonomous subject, in transcendence toward the outer world; but he encounters himself only in a projected form.

When the child develops further, he fights in two ways against his original abandonment. He attempts to deny the separation: rushing into his mother's arms, he seeks her living warmth and demands her caresses. And he attempts to find self-justification through the approbation of others. Adults seem to him like gods, for they have the power to confer existence upon him. He feels the magic of the gaze that makes of him now a delightful little angel, now a monster. His two modes of defense are not mutually exclusive: on the contrary, they complement each other and interpenetrate: When the attempt at self-justification succeeds, the sense of justification finds carnal confirmation in the kisses and caresses obtained; it all amounts to a single state of happy passivity that the child experiences in his mother's lap and under her beneficent gaze. There is no difference in the attitudes of girls and boys during the first three or four years; both try to perpetuate the happy condition that preceded weaning in

\[2\] This theory was proposed by Dr. Leen in Les Complèse familles dans la formation de l'enfant. This observation, one of primary importance, would explain how it is that in the course of its development "the ego retains the analogous aspect of a spectacle."
both sexes enticement and showing-off behavior occur; boys are as
obscene as their sisters of pleasing adults, causing smiles, making
themselves admired.

It is more satisfying to deny the anguish than to rise above it, more
radical to be lost in the bosom of the Whole than to be petrified
by the conscious ego of others; carnal union creates a deeper aliena-
tion than any resignation under the gaze of others. Enticement and
showing off represent a more complex, a less easy stage than simple
abandon in the maternal arms. The magic of the adult gaze is ca-
pulsion. The child pretends to be invisible, has parents enter into the
game, trying blindly to find him and laughing; but all at once they
say: “You’re getting tiresome, you are not invisible at all.” The child
has amused them with a bright saying; he repeats it, and this time
they draw their shoulders. In this world, uncertain and unpredictable
at the universe of Kafka, one stumbles at every step. That is why
many children are afraid of growing up; they are in despair if their
parents cease taking them on their knees or letting them get into the
grown-ups’ bed. Through the physical frustration they feel more and
more crudely the forbidden, the abandonment, which the human
being can never be conscious of without anguish.

This is just where the little girls first appear as privileged beings.
A second meaning, less brutal and more gradual than the first, with-
draws the mother’s body from the child’s embrace; but the boys,
especially are little by little denied the kisses and caresses they have
been used to. As for the little girl, she continues to be caressed, she
is allowed to cling to her mother’s skirts, her father takes her on his
knee and strokes her hair. She wears sweet little dresses, her tears
and caprices are viewed indulgently, her hair is done up carefully,
older people are amused at her expressiveness and coquettices—bodily
contacts and agreeable glances protect her against the anguish of
solitude. The little boy, in contrast, will be denied even concrety; his
efforts at enticement, his play-acting, are irritating. He is told that “a
man doesn’t ask to be kissed. . . . A man doesn’t look at himself in
mirrors. . . . A man doesn’t cry.” He is urged to be “a little man”; he
will obtain adult approval by becoming independent of adults. He
will please them by not appearing to seek to please them.

* In his Orange Juice, Yvan Gaudet relates anecdotes of childhood illustrating the incompatible behavior of both the father and the mother; his conclusion was that “the conduct of grown ups is devilishly incomprehensible.”

The Formative Years: Childhood

Many boys, frightened by the hard independence they are con-
demned to, wish they were girls; formerly, when boys were dressed
in early years like girls, they often shed tears when they had to change
from dresses to trousers and saw their curls cut. Certain of them held
obstinately to the choice of femininity—one form of orientation


the toilet, saying: “I am going to show you how men do it.” Thereafter the child, proud of urinating while standing, scorned girls “who urinate through a hole”; his disdain originally arose not because they lacked an organ but because they had not been singled out and initiated by the father, as he had. Thus, far from the penis representing a direct advantage from which the boy could draw a feeling of superiority, its high valuation appears on the contrary as a compensation—invented by adults and ardently accepted by the child—for the hardships of the second sexing. Thus he is protected against regret for his lost status as nursing and for his not being a girl. Later on, he will incarnate his transcendence and his proud sovereignty in his sex.1

The lot of the little girl is very different. Mothers and nurses feel no reverence or tenderness toward her genital; they do not direct her attention toward that secret organ, invisible except for its covering, and not to be grasped in the hand; in a sense she has no sex organ. She does not experience this absence as a lack; evidently her body is, for her, quite complete; but she finds herself situated in the world differently from the boy, and a constellation of factors can transform this difference, in her eyes, into an inferiority.

There are few questions more extensively discussed by psychoanalysts than the celebrated feminine “castration complex.” Most would admit today that penis envy is manifested in very diverse ways in different cases.2 To begin with, there are many little girls who remain ignorant of the male anatomy for some years. Such a child finds it quite natural that there should be men and women, just as there is sun and a moon; she believes in essences contained in words and her curiosity is not analytic at first. For many others this tiny bit of flesh lying between boys’ legs is insignificant or even laughable; it is a peculiarity that emerges with that of clothing or haircut. Often it is first seen on a small newborn brother and, as Helene Deutsch puts it, “when the little girl is very young she is not impressed by the penis of her little brother.” She cites the case of a

1 See Rock M., p. 48.
2 In addition to the works of Freud and Adler, an abundant literature on the subject is in existence; Abraham was first to voice the idea that the little girl might consider her sex as a second river arising from a masturbation. Karen Horney, Jonas, Jacques Lacan, du Gose, Helene Deutsch, and A. Rabin have studied the question from the psychosomatic or point of view. Someone even has re-used psychoanalysis with the idea of Ringel and Lapet. See also Pollack, Les idees des enfants sur la difference des sexes.

The Formative Years: Childhood

girl of eighteen months who remained quite indifferent to the discovery of the penis and attached no importance to it until much later, in accordance with her personal interests. It may even happen that the penis is considered to be an anomaly: an outgrowth, something vague that belongs, like ears, breasts, or Waste; it can inspire disgust. Finally, the boy is the fact that there are numerous cases where the little girl does take an interest in the penis of a brother or playmate; but that does not mean that she experiences jealousy of it in a really sexual way, still less that she feels deeply affected by the absence of that organ; she wants to get it for herself as she wants to get any and every object, but this desire can remain superficial.

There is no doubt that the excretory functions, and in particular the urinary functions, are of passionate interest to children; indeed, to wet the bed is often a form of protest against a marked preference of the parents for another child. There are countries where the men urinate while seated, and there are cases of women who urinate standing, as is customary with many peasants, among others; but in contemporary Western society, custom generally demands that women sit or crouch, while the erect position is reserved for males. This difference constitutes for the little girl the most striking sexual differentiation. To urinate, she is required to crouch, uncover herself, and therefore hide: a shameful and inconvenient procedure. The shame is intensified in the frequent cases in which the girl suffers from involuntary discharge of urine, as for instance when laughing immoderately; in general her control is not so good as that of the boys.

To boys the urinary functions work like a free game, with the charm of all games that offer liberty of action; the penis can be manipulated, it gives opportunity for action, which is one of the deep interests of the child. A little girl on seeing a boy urinating exclaimed admiringly: “How convenient!” But the stream can be directed at will and to a considerable distance, which gives the boy a feeling of omnipotence. Proust spoke of “the burning ambition of early diuretics”; Stiebel has discussed this formula sensibly, but it is true, as Karen Horney says, that the “fantasies of omnipotence, especially those of sadistic character, are frequently associated with the male urinary

1 Cited by A. Rabin.